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THE SPEECH

OF THE

Hon. THOMAS ERSKINE,

AT A

MEETING of the FRIENDS

TO THE

Liberty of the Press,

AT

FREE-MASON'S TAVERN, Dec. 22, 1792.

With the RESOLUTIONS, &c.

OF THAT

TRULY PATRIOTIC SOCIETY.

L O N D O N:

PRINTED FOR JAMES RIDGWAY,

YORK-STREET, ST. JAMES'S-SQUARE.

(Price Threepence, or Twenty Shillings per Hundred.)

1792.

FREE MASONS' TAVERN,

DECEMBER 22.

The next MEETING of the FRIENDS of the LIBERTY of the PRESS will be held at the Free Masons' Tavern on Saturday the 19th of January.

Dinner on the Table at Five o'Clock.

The Honourable THOMAS ERSKINE, M. P. in the Chair.

STEWARDS.

G. N. Edwardes, Esq. M. P.	R. B. Sheridan, Esq. M. P.
C. Grey, Esq. M. P.	Earl of Lauderdale
C. Warren, Esq.	S. W. Whitbread, Esq. M. P.
M. A. Taylor, Esq. M. P.	W. H. Lambton, Esq. M. P.
George Rous, Esq.	Mr. Serjeant Bond
H. Clifford, Esq.	George Byng, Esq. M. P.
J. Phillips, Esq.	Hon. T. Maitland, M. P.
B. Hollis, Esq.	Col. Macleod, M. P.
E. J. Curtis, Esq.	B. Greathead, Esq.
A. Piggot, Esq.	J. Mackintosh, Esq.
G. Tierney, Esq.	C. F. Ward, Esq.
J. Thompson, Esq. M. P.	

Tickets to be had at the Bar of the Free Masons Tavern, at 7s. 6d. each, Wine included.



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T H E
S P E E C H, &c.

Attempts having been made to invade the Liberties of the Press, a very large and most respectable Meeting was held at the Free Mason's Tavern, on Saturday, the 22d of December, 1792, to take into consideration such Measures as were necessary to counteract such Attempts, and to regain for the People the Freedom of public Discussion.

GERARD NOEL EDWARDS, Esq. Member of Parliament for the county of Rutland, being seated in the chair by unanimous consent, begged leave to assure the Meeting, that he was a most zealous friend to the object for which they were assembled. He trusted that their proceedings would be marked with a firmness that no ministerial menaces should dismay, and with a perseverance that no difficulties should weaken. Thus firm, thus persevering, thus decorous, he could not permit himself to entertain a doubt of the eventual success of their endeavours.

Mr. CLIFFORD was then desired to read the following Resolutions. He observed that they appeared to him so very beneficial in their tendency, that he should content himself, for the present, with only reading them.

After the Resolutions had been read, it was determined that they should be put separately. Mr. Clifford having proposed that the first should be agreed to,

Mr. ROUS seconded the motion. As the motion contained a truism, it would be unnecessary, he said, and impertinent in him to trouble the Assembly with any observations upon it. As, however, he had risen to second the motion, he would avail himself of the opportunity of saying a few words. It was impossible, he said, that liberty could exist, if arbitrary restrictions were imposed on public discussion; for liberty supposed a knowledge of the common

interest, and an union to support that interest. By what means could that be known? By allowing a free operation to discussion, and by permitting the diffusion of information among the people. On the second and third resolutions, he intreated permission to make a few observations. The second resolution was in truth no more than the same idea conveyed in the first, detailed, however, in more words, for the purpose of making it more obvious. How could measures be tried, but by the conflict of opinion? the public being the judges of the truth or falsehood of them. If no such conflict were allowed, those who propagated doctrines that were new, might fall a victim to them; and the best persons might be sacrificed to the ignorance of the age in which they lived. The Assembly would recollect how many of the human race, who had maintained positions that were now universally admitted, had been confined in dungeons, or perished miserably on a scaffold. Public discussion was, in his opinion, as necessary to the happiness of mankind, as the light of the sun was to the discernment of colours. The third resolution was only such a one as was best adapted to express the sentiments of the Meeting in the indispensable necessity of allowing freedom of discussion in all public measures. It marked this distinction, that, while they demand this freedom of discussing every subject of public opinion, they admitted that the interests of government required that that discussion should be under subordination, and in a great degree under the direction of the civil magistrate. If the right of discussion had not been used by those who lived in old times, what would the government of England have been in the present moment? It would not have been discovered, that, by making the crown hereditary, the ambition of men would be restrained within proper limits, inasmuch as by no efforts of theirs could they obtain the first office in the state. But for this provision, the contest that would be eternally maintained by ambitious men would prove dangerous and destructive to the existence of public peace and public security. There was another truth, which he trusted the people would discern (in spite of the endeavours of those who would prevent them from discerning it) that the democratic part of the constitution of England could alone restrain the establishment of a permanent executive magistracy, and could alone

alone restrain the Nobility and the Episcopacy from rallying round the Throne to support it in Tyranny and Despotism.

There were men who talked of the Constitution as if it were only to be admired by ignorance; who mentioned it in such a manner, as if the diffusion of knowledge would bring it into contempt and abhorrence. The Constitution, however, was really an object for the admiration and applause of wisdom. Freedom of discussion would be found to increase that admiration and that applause; it would be found to strengthen the interests of Government, if Government would condescend to know its real interests.

The subsequent Resolutions tended to express the uneasiness and alarm which the Meeting experienced in beholding the formation of Associations for the avowed purpose of stifling discussion; and of arresting the operations of thought.

The *Crown and Anchor* Resolutions deserved reprobation, because they were illegal and insulting to Government. This Association, in fact, said, that the Laws and Government were not adequate to the Government of the Country, and that the Magistrates were not competent to judge what was either libellous or seditious. These Associations had the impudence to erect themselves into *State Inquisitors*, and Licensers of the Press, and to hold out encouragement to spies and informers. Such conduct, he argued, must raise indignation in every feeling breast. For what did these men do? They armed the servant against the Master, relative against relative, child against father, and their Resolutions were calculated to disturb and destroy all the comforts and the peace of domestic tranquillity. They would drive men back to the ages of superstition and darkness; and they tended to make the People of this Country suppose that no Free Government existed. They wished to shew that their exertions were superior to the exertions of the Government of the Country, and to assume to themselves the character of State Inquisitors. What he asked, was the existing Government, founded on, but on the rights of the People? It was the People that raised the present Royal Family to the Throne, and what better protection could that Family have than the hearts of the People. And here he trusted that the blind zeal, and misguided conduct of ridiculous Associations, would not operate to alienate the loyalty of those

those subjects who loved his Majesty and his illustrious progeny. He trusted that it was unnecessary to excite the contempt of the Meeting against these insolent Associators, who gratified a *miserable creeping* ambition, by attempting, as much as in them lay, to annihilate free discussion, and erect themselves into Directors of the Press. Finally, he hoped, that if any individual was selected for prosecution, for delivering speculative opinions on Government, that the present Assembly would stand forward to defend and protect him.

Mr. Rous's animated speech was received with much applause.

The first Resolution was carried without one dissentient voice.

When the second was put.

Mr. THELWALL stated a fact. A person who had said in the street that a Reform in Parliament was necessary, was overheard by a Common Councilman, one of the Associators, who dragged him to the place where the Association to which he belonged was held, and by menaces obliged him to subscribe his name to a string of Resolutions, the purport of which he did not know. The person so treated was in the room.

A Tradesman of the neighbourhood, stated also another circumstance, of a more atrocious nature. A man of the name of Baxter had attended the meeting held in the church of St. Leonard, Shoreditch. He suggested a doubt of the existence of persons who were Levellers, or who wished to convert England into a Republic. He was immediately dragged down from the steps of the pulpit, where he was standing, and trampled on by five persons, one of whom was a clergyman. He was then forced out of the church, knocked down, and his skull almost fractured. In addition to this cruelty, he was carried before a Magistrate, and accused of High Treason. The Magistrate, however, released him from this charge; and it was then resolved to indict him, first, for a Libel, and afterwards for a Riot. The last offence being alledged against him, he had been forced to enter into a bond of 40l. for his appearance at the next Quarter Sessions, to take his trial for such Riot.

This fact, the poor man said, he was desired by Baxter to mention to the Assembly, whose protection he claimed.

Uni.

Universal indignation pervaded the Meeting.

But Mr. EDWARDS the Chairman on a Resolution being proposed, expressive of this indignation, wished to call the attention of the Meeting to the subject. He said, that that as the Gentlemen assembled merely to consider the state of the Press, he submitted if it were strictly in order to introduce any extraneous matter. He strenuously recommended to the Meeting, to abstain from any mention of Mr. PAINE's book, and he declared though he might be unknown, yet he would proceed hand in hand with them constitutionally to obtain their object. If any thing could detach him from the Meeting, it would be an act of intemperance. Such an event, however, he did not expect from a Meeting that had conducted itself in that discreet manner, that would in the end confound the machinations of those who were inimical to it.

The second Resolution was carried unanimously.

The Resolution which expressed a doubt of the Legality of Associations being put,

Mr. O'BRIEN suggested, that as it was their wish to act in such a manner as was strictly defensible, whether the words 'doubtful as to its Legality,' were not rather too strong?

Mr. ROUS and Mr. CLIFFORD, however, convinced the Assembly that they were not.

Mr. COURTNEY (the Member of Parliament) conceived the words *certainly unconstitutional* would be more proper.

Mr. GREY, M. P. maintained that the original assertion was not too strong; for the Legality of such Associations had been doubted by the late Lord Ashburton, and other eminent Lawyers. He therefore proposed, that the words 'doubtful as to the Legality' should stand, and that they should be succeeded by the following—'Unconstitutional in principle, oppressive in operation, and destructive to the liberties of the Press.'

The Resolution thus amended, was adopted unanimously.

The other Resolutions were afterwards put, and agreed to without one dissentient voice.

THANKS TO MR. ERSKINE.

MAJOR MAITLAND declared that he had one Resolution to propose, which, he was convinced, would receive

the complete approbation of every Gentleman present.—The Resolution did not relate to any of the Associations. It did not relate to any who subscribed to the doctrines of those Associations. It related to one man, to whom the thanks of the Meeting, to whom the thanks of the whole Nation, were most particularly due. He trusted that it would not be deemed impertinent to mention his name, a name that was graven on the hearts of every one present. If there were any who were ignorant of that person to whom they owed the present law with respect to Libels, to those persons he did not address himself. He did not address himself to such as enjoyed blessings without endeavouring to discover the source whence they proceeded. It was his wish to make an allusion in the Resolution he was about to propose, to the late Trial at Guildhall, without implicating any mention of Mr. Thomas Paine. He had heard that every solicitation had been used to deter his Hon. Friend from defending that cause. He had heard that these solicitations had been made by persons high in office and authority; on such disgraceful conduct he should make no comment, but trusting that the great and glorious speech of his Friend would be disseminated to every part of the kingdom, and that every word of it would be remembered, he should conclude by simply reading his Resolution.

Mr. ROUS seconded the proposition.

Mr. O'BRIEN conceived that some words of the motion rather glanced at Mr. Paine's book, which it seemed to approve.

Mr. FRANCIS coincided with Mr. O'Brien—he intreated the Meeting to be cautious and circumspect in their proceedings, and not in doing a little good, be guilty of doing much evil. He entreated the Meeting not to disarm itself by any act of intemperance. It had to encounter calumny and malevolence, and every act of the Meeting, he had no doubt would be misrepresented. He saw no necessity for the mention of Mr. Paine's book.—It would only excite obloquy, and it was a circumstance with which the object of the Meeting was not in the least concerned.

Mr. GERALD thought the Meeting should not be so cautious in mentioning Mr. Paine's work, since Mr. Erskine defended the doctrines contained in it.

Mr:

Mr. CLIFFORD denied that Mr. Erskine defended them; he only defended the right every man possessed of publishing speculative opinions upon Government, if such opinions were not published expressly to excite sedition.

Mr. COURTNEY said, whatever his private opinion of the book might be, it was now deemed a Libel in a Court of Justice, and he thought that the Meeting would act unwisely by passing a Resolution approving of its doctrines. The Resolution by giving even indirect applause to the Rights of Man, would subject the Meeting to a degree of obloquy that could answer no good purpose. It was better, he conceived, not to rouse peoples prejudices, but to act with circumspection, this would defeat the enemies of this Meeting, and could not fail of procuring an augmentation to its number.

Mr. GREY agreed with Mr. Courtney, and wished some alteration to be made in the Resolution that should avoid any mention of Mr. Paine.

M. ROUS acknowledged, that it would be adviseable not to glance at Mr. Paine's work, although the Meeting meant to contend that he had a right to publish it. Mr. Burke's *book* was certainly a more atrocious Libel on the human race, but he had a right to publish it. Submitting, however, to the loss of estimation, which must be his portion, who should advance that which he could not defend, unwillingly that Right Honourable Gentleman had done more for liberty than almost any man; he had provoked answers, had been controverted in every one of his despotic positions, and had been driven disgracefully out of the field. The thanks of the country were due to Mr. Erskine, for having placed the subject in this view, that without entering into the principles of a work, an advocate might contend for the right of every man to publish speculative opinions upon Government.

Mr. TIERNEY spoke a few words.

Mr. PIGGOT thought it should be expressed in the resolution for what particular service the Meeting thanked Mr. Erskine. With regard to any allusion to Mr. Paine's Work, that would certainly be improper, because Mr. Paine might still move the Court of King's Bench in Arrest of Judgment.

The Resolution, after some amendments, was put, and unanimously agreed to, *vide the Resolutions*.

MR.

MR. ERSKINE

As soon as the Vote of Thanks had been passed, entered the Room. The applauses bestowed upon him were so great and so vehement, that for a quarter of an hour he was not suffered to speak. At length, with much agitation, and moved even to tears, he addressed the Assembly in the following manner :

“ GENTLEMEN.

“ I feel myself so deeply impressed with a sense of the
 “ very high honour you have conferred on me, that I cannot convey my thanks to you in language sufficiently
 “ expressive. I believe that it will be found with me as
 “ with the rest of the human species, that applause and
 “ approbation soften and melt the heart, while opposition
 “ and difficulty stimulate and rouse it to a system of action more vigorous and energetic. It is therefore, Gentlemen, that my present feelings are more poignant and
 “ acute than when calumny poured the foulest insinuations upon me, and slander deduced every action from
 “ the most unworthy motives.

“ From the temper the firmness, and the perseverance
 “ which you have evinced this day, I augur that England
 “ will feel, from one extremity to the other, the good
 “ effects of your deliberations.—One of the Resolutions
 “ you have passed is, “ that a system of arbitrary coercion
 “ has always been dangerous to the Government of
 “ England.”—This is the fact; and should ever any
 “ Administration adopt such a system, I trust that we shall
 “ convince them that it is not only dangerous to the peace
 “ of the country, but personally dangerous to themselves.

“ Gentlemen, it would afford me much uneasiness if
 “ any applause with which you should honour me, were
 “ to produce misconstruction and misrepresentation. In
 “ this season, however, I fear that such an effect
 “ cannot be averted. But let it be some consolation to
 “ know, that our intentions will only be misconstrued and misrepresented by those who are endeavouring to deprive us of our most valuable blessings.

“ In the cause which has been alluded to, a verdict has
 “ been given, of which I mean to say nothing. But it is
 “ certainly in the power of Mr. Paine to bring his case
 “ for

“ for a revision, and to demand from the Court a decision
 “ on the nature and extent of his defence. If he should be dis-
 “ satisfied with this decision, he may appeal to the judgment
 “ of the House of Lords, by bringing a Writ of Error be-
 “ fore them. As no final determination therefore has been
 “ made, we should by pronouncing our opinion upon the
 “ work now, do that which we all reprobate, we should
 “ prejudge it.

“ In the defence of Mr. Paine, I neither supported nor
 “ surrendered the doctrines he has advanced. I pleaded
 “ his cause in the same manner as he would have been per-
 “ mitted to plead it himself. I told the Jury that should
 “ they even be satisfied that Monarchy was an evil, and
 “ that a Republican form of Government was, as Har-
 “ rington in his *Oceana* calls it, the *ancient prudence* of
 “ the world, yet that they would not be justified in pro-
 “ nouncing a verdict of acquittal, if it should be proved
 “ that what was done was done with a view to excite sedi-
 “ tion, and to overturn the Constitution of the Country.

“ Gentlemen, when I look back and see what has hap-
 “ pened in this kingdom within the last seven months, I
 “ consider it more as a shocking prodigy than a natural
 “ charge in human affairs. What was the cause of the abo-
 “ lition of the infamous Star Chamber? That men might
 “ discuss all public measures. It was destroyed on this
 “ principle, That all Governments proceeded from the
 “ people, and stood alone on their will for their continu-
 “ ance. The right of discussing the private character of a
 “ man is not within the right of the people, because if such
 “ man shall have violated the laws, the laws are compe-
 “ tent to punish that violation, and the people cannot be
 “ his judges. But the liberty of discussing public subjects,
 “ subjects that affect the community does belong to the
 “ people; because there the people may be judges.

“ There are some, Gentlemen, who contend that the
 “ people possess no authority to alter and amend the Con-
 “ stitution under which they live. If this be true, why
 “ are they ever insulted with appeals made to them for
 “ the purpose of producing such an alteration. If this be
 “ true, we had better burn our Resolutions, we are a pack
 “ of Conspirators, and we meet for the very purpose of
 “ Sedition and Rebellion.

“ We

“ We have a good Constitution that wants amendment,
 “ but which it is not necessary to destroy. Let us rub
 “ off the spots that obscure its glory, and then let us look at
 “ it again.

“ As soon as the *Star Chamber* had been abolished,
 “ Government began to *pack Juries*, and at length the
 “ Judges, *forsooth*, contended that they possessed the right
 “ of deciding in cases of Libels. This Constitution, there-
 “ fore, which the Attorney-General, by a most curious
 “ argument, declared to have lasted *from all Eternity*, is
 “ only about a year old.

“ Gentlemen, I should indeed consider myself as a most
 “ disgraceful being, if I did not devote myself to the ser-
 “ vice of those to whom I owe every thing. When I
 “ left the Army, struggling with distress and want, I
 “ learned what was the practice in cases of libels, and
 “ thought it strange if the Law was so. I trusted that
 “ perseverance and fortitude would renovate what was ne-
 “ cessary to be renovated; and I thank God that I have
 “ not been disappointed. When I addressed the Jury in
 “ the case of the *Dean of St. Asaph*, I observed at large
 “ on those words, *wicked, scandalous and seditious* words,
 “ that are to be found in every pleader’s shop. I con-
 “ tended for the right of publishing opinions on Govern-
 “ ment, and was told, as a child is, not to disturb the
 “ Court with my idle prattle. And here, Gentlemen,
 “ in justice to Lord Mansfield, I must say, that the ex-
 “ ploded doctrine of Libels had not its origin in him. No
 “ blame, therefore, is to be attached to his character on
 “ this account. If he does deserve reprehension, it is for
 “ not exercising the great talents he possessed in throwing
 “ off a system so destructive to the liberties of the sub-
 “ ject. Eight years ago I was told that the Jury had no
 “ power—that they were only to see whether print was
 “ print, and to decide whether a book had been publish-
 “ ed, and on such proof were they to pronounce a De-
 “ fendant guilty of a Libel alledged to be most scandalous,
 “ wicked, and seditious. I was considered then, as I
 “ shall be to-morrow, and I hope to all eternity by these
 “ Associations, as using language dangerous to the Con-
 “ stitution—I was beat down by a yell as loud as that
 “ which has occasioned us to assemble here at this present
 “ moment. I came back to the charge again and again,
 “ as

" as those ought to do who are once foiled. The People of
 " England in the mean time were spiritless and dead. But
 " there is a time when delusion must end. If we look
 " back into the history of the world we shall find that all
 " our Liberties have been produced from sparks.—The
 " People, spiritless and dead so long, begin to rouse them-
 " selves. The danger at length grew greater and greater,
 " and as in the beginning of the storm, wave impels wave
 " to the shore, till at length the whole sea becomes agi-
 " tated; so the storm of popular indignation arose to such
 " a height, that even this *virtuous* House of Commons at
 " last attended to the wishes of the People. It became
 " now a consideration who was to be the *Midwife*. If I
 " had introduced the Libel Bill into the House of Com-
 " mons, I am convinced that there were so many devoted
 " to the judges that the Bill would not have passed. I
 " therefore committed it to a man possessed of infinite
 " judgment, of the clearest mind, of the soundest heart.
 " I committed it to Mr. Fox—there my voyage ended.

" Say, shall my little bark attend thy sail,

" Pursue the triumph and partake the gale.

" The People now awoke as from a deep sleep—They
 " flocked round the standard of Mr. Fox, and the House
 " of Commons acceded to the Bill. But when it went
 " up to the House of Lords there were some there who
 " stuck it to the very bone.—Am I angry with them?
 " No. But it ought to be a lesson to them who are only
 " as three in a whole country, how they convict people
 " of Libels, merely to support the singularity of their
 " opinions.

" If I am asked what is the definition of an insurrec-
 " tion, I reply that I do not know. Is it a few boys
 " planting the Tree of Liberty at Dundee? I remem-
 " ber rather a vulgar song, which I wish I had recollected
 " on a recent occasion. It began with—

" There was an Old Woman who lived at Dunder,

" And out of her Backside there grew a Plumb-Tree."

" It should seem as if this good old Lady had risen
 " from the dead, in pity to the present Administration,
 " and

“ and for the purpose of giving some countenance to their
“ Proclamation.

“ If the people were convened to decide whether the
“ Power of Judgment in Libels should be restored to the
“ Judges, I am convinced that not one hand would be
“ held up in support of such a proposition. When a man
“ has an opinion, he ought to publish it without being
“ calumniated. The Administration of Justice, is or
“ ought to be pure and impartial. Freedom of discussion
“ ought to be allowed, and ‘ the issue of the brain,’ in
“ the words of Milton, ‘ ought to be as free as the issue
“ of the womb.’

“ If these Associations, Gentlemen, continue, I shall
“ move for establishment of a public licenser. The danger
“ and the oppression will be less. I may give him my
“ book, and if he refuses to license it, I know the con-
“ sequences of publishing it. But if the purses of all the
“ *placemen and pensioners* in England are to be employed
“ in rewarding spies and informers, if the wealth of
“ the treasury, and those who live on the treasury, is to be
“ spent in checking the operation of thought, how are
“ the poor to resist the oppression, and to avert the evil ?

“ Let us, therefore, Gentlemen, oppose law to those
“ who are not guided by law. In a short time, the peo-
“ ple will look at each picture, and find which is right and
“ which is wrong. These Associators will then separate
“ fast enough ; they will be dissipated as the insects are at
“ the rising of the sun.

“ I am happy, Gentlemen, that we have met: let us
“ continue to meet, and our numbers will rapidly en-
“ crease.—I belong to the people—they raised me from
“ poverty to affluence—from obscurity to notice—they
“ have a right to demand my services—they shall have
“ them.”

Mr. ERSKINE'S Speech was received with unprece-
dented applause, and he retired accompanied by the me-
rited benedictions of the whole Assembly.

An advertisement, calumniating the Meeting, was read,
but it was deemed to be too contemptible for notice.

It was determined by an unanimous vote, that the Meet-
ing should be held again on Saturday the 19th of January.

The Assembly was honoured by the presence and sup-
port of Mr. Sheridan, Mr. Grey, Mr. Erskine, Mr. M.

A. Tay-

A. Taylor, Mr. Francis, Mr. Courtney, Major Maitland, Mr. G. Rous, Mr. Pigott, Mr. Brand Hollis, Mr. Tierney, Mr. Ward, Mr. Hayward, Mr. Mackintosh, Mr. Curtis, Mr. Clifford, Mr. Kid, Mr. Agar, Mr. O'Brien, Mr. Richardson, Count Zenobio, Mr. Britton, Mr. Philips, Dr. Gregory, Mr. Gerald, Mr. Milnes, Col. Bosville, Mr. Redman, Mr. Robert Knight, and a numerous attendance of truly honest men.

FREE MASONS' TAVERN,

DECEMBER 22.

At a General Meeting of the Friends of the Freedom of the Press, convened this day by public advertisement,

GERARD NOEL EDWARDS, Esq. M.P.

In the Chair,

Unanimously Resolved,

1st. That the Liberty of the Press is a right inseparable from the Principles of a free Government, and essential to the security of the British constitution.

2d. That this liberty consists in the free discussion and examination of the principles of civil government, and of all matters of public opinion.

3d. That no writing ought to be considered as a public libel, and made the subject of criminal prosecution, unless such writing shall appear to be published with a design to excite the People to resist the Civil Magistrate, or obstruct the execution of the existing laws.

4th. That such publications may become proper objects of prosecution, and that the Executive Government is entrusted with powers amply sufficient for that purpose.

5th. That we have therefore seen with uneasiness and alarm the formation of certain societies, which, under the pretence of supporting the executive magistrate, and defending the Government against sedition, have held out general terrors against the circulation of writings; which, without describing them, they term seditious; and entered into subscriptions for the maintenance of prosecutions against them; a proceeding doubtful as to its legality, unconstitutional in its principle, oppressive in its operation, and destructive of the Liberty of the Press.

6th. That such associations have appeared to us the more exceptionable from an attentive observation of their proceedings. Whilst mutually binding and engaging themselves

selves to enforce the execution of the laws against seditious libels, they have themselves produced and circulated publications, containing doctrines long since exploded, and which, if admitted, would prove the Revolution to be an act of rebellion, and the title of the reigning Family to the throne of these kingdoms to be founded in usurpation and injustice.

7th. That a system of jealousy and arbitrary coercion of the people has been at all times dangerous to the stability of the English Government.

8th. That anxious to preserve the public peace as connected with public Liberty, this Meeting considers it as an indispensable duty to warn their fellow subjects against all proceedings which appear to be inconsistent with either, *on whatever pretext they may be grounded.* We are therefore determined to oppose, to the utmost of our power, every attempt to prejudice any part of the Constitution, to maintain that which appears to be its best security, the Freedom of the Press; and to use our endeavours to counteract the effect of measures which seem calculated to suppress these liberal sentiments, and that manly freedom of discussion, which form the life and soul of the British Constitution.

9th. That the thanks of this Meeting are particularly due to the Hon. Thomas Erskine, for his Constitutional Defence of the Freedom of Opinion and the Liberty of the Press in a late Trial; a Defence in which he displayed ability, independence, zeal and eloquence, never surpassed on any former occasion at the English Bar, though that Defence was made under circumstances of such peculiar difficulty and embarrassment, as required his determined spirit and unshaken fortitude to overcome, and though he had to encounter every prejudice which art and industry could excite.

By Order of the Meeting.

(Signed)

GERARD NOEL EDWARDS,
Chairman.

Resolved,

That the thanks of this Meeting be given to the Chairman, for his fair, honourable, and impartial conduct.

Resolved,

That this Meeting do now adjourn until Saturday the 19th of January next.



